

Remarks of President Barack Obama
Promoting the Recovery Plan with Secretary Chu
Department of Energy
February 5, 2009

Thank you, Secretary Chu, for bringing your experience and expertise to this new role. And thank you all so much for your service each and every day here at the Department. Your mission is so important and will only grow as we seek to transform the ways we produce and use energy for the sake of our environment, our security – and our economy.

As we are meeting, in the halls of Congress just down the street from here, there's a debate going on about the plan I've proposed, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan.

This isn't some abstract debate. Last week, we learned that many of America's largest corporations are planning to layoff tens of thousands of workers. Today we learned that last week, the number of new unemployment claims jumped to 626,000. And tomorrow, we're expecting another dismal jobs report on top of the 2.6 million jobs we lost last year.

Now, I believe that legislation of such magnitude deserves the scrutiny that's it received over the last month. But these numbers that we're seeing are sending an unmistakable message – and so are the American people. The time for talk is over. The time for action is now. Because we know that if we don't act, a bad situation will become dramatically worse. Crisis could turn into catastrophe for families and businesses across our country.

I refuse to let that happen. We can't delay and we can't go back to the same worn ideas that led us here in the first place. In the last few days, we've seen proposals arise from some in Congress that you may not have read, but would be very familiar to you. They're rooted in the idea that tax cuts alone can solve our problems. That half-measures and tinkering are somehow enough. That we can afford to ignore our most fundamental economic challenges – the crushing cost of health care, the inadequate state of so many schools, and our dangerous dependence on foreign oil.

Let me be perfectly clear: those ideas have been tested, and they have failed. They have taken us from surpluses to an annual deficit of over a trillion dollars, and they have brought our economy to a halt. And that's precisely what the election we just had was all about. The American people have rendered their judgment. Now is the time to move forward, not back. Now is the time for action.

Just as past generations of Americans have done in trying times, we can and must turn this moment of challenge into one of opportunity. The plan I've proposed has at its core a simple idea: let's put Americans to work doing the work that America needs done.

This plan will save or create over three million jobs – almost all of them in the private sector.

This plan will put people to work rebuilding our crumbling roads and bridges; our dangerous deficient dams and levees.

This plan will put people to work modernizing our health care system, not only saving us billions of dollars, but countless lives.

This plan will put people to work renovating more than 10,000 schools, giving millions of children the chance to learn in 21st century classrooms, libraries, and labs – and to all the scientists in the room today, you know what that means for America's future.

This plan will provide sensible tax relief for the struggling middle-class, unemployment insurance and continued health care coverage for those who've lost their jobs, and it will help prevent our states and local communities from laying off firefighters, teachers, and police.

Finally, this plan will begin to end the tyranny of oil in our time.

After decades of dragging our feet, this plan will finally spark the creation of a clean energy industry that will create hundreds of thousands of jobs over the next few years, manufacturing wind turbines and solar cells for example, and millions more after that. These jobs and these investments will double our capacity to generate renewable energy over the next few years.

We'll fund a better, smarter electricity grid and train workers to build it – a grid that will help us ship wind and solar power from one end of this country to another. Think about it. The grid that powers the tools of modern life – computers, appliances, even blackberries - looks largely the same as it did half a century ago. Just these first steps toward modernizing the way we distribute electricity could reduce consumption by 2 to 4 percent.

We'll also lead a revolution in energy efficiency, modernizing more than 75 percent of federal buildings and improving the efficiency of more than 2 million American homes. This will not only create jobs, it will cut the federal energy bill by a third and save taxpayers \$2 billion each year and save Americans billions of dollars more on their utility bills.

In fact, as part of this effort, today I've signed a presidential memorandum requesting that the Department of Energy set new efficiency standards for common household appliances. This will save consumers money. This will spur innovation. And this will conserve tremendous amounts energy. We'll save through these simple steps over the next thirty years the amount of energy produced over a two-year period by all the coal-fired power plants in America.

And through investments in our mass transit systems to boost capacity, in our roads to reduce congestion, and in technologies that will accelerate the development of

innovations like plug-in hybrid vehicles, we'll be making a significant down payment on a cleaner and more independent energy future.

Now, I read the other day that the critics of this plan ridiculed our notion that we should use part of the money to modernize the entire fleet of federal vehicles to take advantage of state of the art fuel-efficiency. They call it pork. You know the truth. It will not only save the government significant money over time, it will not only create jobs manufacturing those vehicles, it will set a standard for private industry to match. And so when you hear these attacks deriding something of such obvious importance as this, you have to ask yourself – is it any wonder we haven't had a real energy policy in this country?

For the last few years, I've talked about these issues with Americans from one end of this country to another. Washington may not be ready to get serious about energy independence, but I am. And so are you. And so are the American people.

Inaction is not an option that is acceptable to me and it's certainly not acceptable to the American people – not on energy, not on the economy, and not at this critical moment.

So I call on the members of Congress – Democrats and Republicans – to rise to this moment. No plan is perfect, and there have been constructive changes made to this one over the last month. There may be more today. But the scale and scope of this plan is right. It's what America needs right now, and we need to move forward today. I thank you all for being here, and I'm eager to work with Secretary Chu and all of you as we stand up to meet the challenges of this new century.

Thank you very much.